



Social Media and Electronic Communication Policy

Policy Statement

Endless possibilities have been opened up for evangelism and relationship building through communication technology. While recognising the potential of such communication for the church and its mission, all social media and electronic communications in the Diocese must be respectful, truthful and just. We are committed to ensuring that our use of social media and other electronic communications reflect our Christian values and protect the rights and safety of all involved.

Scope

The procedures below apply to all clergy, church employees and members of church organisations in the Diocese of Nelson, particularly those representing the church.

Procedures to be followed

- All communications are to be in accordance with the Diocese of Nelson Codes of Conduct and Ethical Guidelines. Appropriate language, content and behaviour will be maintained.
- Social media must not be used to disparage the Church, the Diocese of Nelson or its personnel.
- Communications sent digitally are **not confidential** and potentially may be shared or reposted to others without an individual's permission or knowledge. Personal and institutional privacy settings must be applied, reviewed and upgraded regularly. A clear statement must be included on sites that materials posted are not confidential.
- If posting photos of children or youth on a web page or other social media, obtain photo release from parents at the beginning of the year. Do not provide personal or identifying information about the children or youth pictured. The following wording may be added to registration information:

I understand that photos or videos of my child and others may be taken during Sunday school, youth group or other church events. I consent to the use of my child's photo or likeness by the church in promotional materials such as website, Facebook and other social media outlets. I understand that my child's identifying information will not be provided unless I give permission at a later time.

Alternatively, you may simply want to ask parents/guardians if they object to their children's photo being taken at the time of the photograph.

- Social networking sites should include a brief Code of Conduct. An example of a Code for site users might be as follows:

All posts and comments should reflect Christian charity and respect for the truth. They should be on topic and presume the good will of other posters. Discussion should take place primarily from a faith perspective. No ads please.

- Adult administrators may remove posts or photo tags they deem inappropriate and may block someone who repeatedly writes inappropriate posts.
- Appropriate boundaries should always be observed, particularly when relating to young people. In the same way that we set boundaries for the safety and protection of children and adults in our diocesan policies, we need to recognise safe boundaries in our use of social media and be aware of the ways it can be misused. Laws concerning reporting of suspected child abuse or exploitation of children, youth, elders and vulnerable adults apply in the virtual world as they do in the physical world.
- In particular, those interacting online or by text, especially with youth, must:
 - **Consider whether to ‘friend’ youth** or keep their social media profiles private. If possible, youth ministry interactions should be encouraged through a public page or group that is visible to parents and maintains strong filters for posts. If a leader chooses to friend youth from their youth ministry, they must ensure their posts / pics and comments are always in line with their ministry values and understand that there is no separation between public and private ministry life. This means never posting anything objectionable or offensive and ensuring the language and humour used is encouraging at all times.
 - **Ensure strong boundaries around messaging.** Only message/text youth in working hours or early evening if necessary for ministry related matters and be aware that any private correspondence with a young person can be viewed by your supervisor at request for accountability. For this reason any private pastoral matters arising through social media/text should be addressed in a face to face meeting with the young person/s or via a phone call. Youth leaders should not field pastoral messages from youth of the opposite gender and must have a plan/people in place for this scenario.
 - **Monitor frequency of contact.** Text messages should be used for reminders, notices and responding to urgent pastoral care requests, but not conversational threads unrelated to youth ministry. Calling the youth or their parents to chat through what is needed is always preferred. If sending bulk texts with notices, be sensitive to how often these are sent out and refrain from spamming people. Again, all posts and texts should be made in working hours unless you are contacted for an urgent pastoral request.
 - **Communicate with parents.** Any information shared with youth online should also be available to parents – especially notices and events. Parents should also be made aware of requests for pastoral contact and informed of when and where this will take place (especially for youth in school years 7-10). Such contact should always be in a public setting or the young person’s home with others present. Confidentiality can be kept concerning the subject matter of a pastoral visit unless it relates to a crime or at risk situation, in which case the youth leader must inform their supervisor.
 - **Correspond wisely.** Email is a useful way to share information in a concise manner but it can be an unhelpful medium for emotionally sensitive matters. Tone of voice, emotion and intention behind emails can be easily misinterpreted by the recipient. Always check an email’s tone and intention before sending and refrain from writing emails in

frustration or anger. Where possible, matters of conflict or complaint should be addressed in a phone call or face to face meeting, with support people present if required, and always fielded in a professional and God honouring manner.

- Online gatherings, Bible study or meetings are subject to the same rules and parameters as a meeting in 'reality'.
- A clear distinction should be maintained between personal and professional communication when using social media. Having said this, our call as Christians is a whole-of-life call and all communications, both personal and professional, should reflect our Christian values. This is especially so for clergy who, through ordination, publicly witness to the call of God on the whole of their lives.
- The personal sites of clergy and diocesan/parish employees should reflect their Christian values. Remember you are witnessing to your Christian faith through all social networking, whether public or private.
- The Diocese or parish must give permission for use of their logos on social media sites.